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OPEN LETTERS.

Suggested by Kuntze's "Revisio Generum Plantarum."

In recent years many changes of well established names have been made solely to satisfy the law of priority, and not owing to any difference in judgment as to generic or specific rank. In some instances this has been carried so far as to abandon long established and household words for names wholly unknown and often inappropriate, because the latter were published a year earlier, or even not any earlier, but simply on the preceding page of the same book, or still logically, say, in the preceding paragraph or line.

When we have objected to calling *Nymphæa Castalia*, or *Carya Hicoria*, or *Magnolia grandiflora M. fetida*, our mouths have been stopped by the law of priority, and our ruffled tempers have been smoothed by the assurance that all of these vexatious changes were *in the line of stability*, that it would take only a few years to get accustomed to calling Jones *Brown* and Smith *Thompson*, and after the first little inconvenience and strangeness all would settle down into blissful permanency. The mild suggestion that, owing to the different judgments of men and the zeal of future antiquarians we might be simply opening the floodgates to an increased instability, has generally been received by the innovators with bland incredulity. But, to show how the thing really works, now comes along Kuntze with his tremendous *Revisio Generum Plantarum*, and finds it necessary to make 30,000 changes in specific names before he can publish his description of species collected in a journey round the world! Alas, in obedience to the new dictum, or dictator, for he speaks *ex cathedra*, we must no longer call Jones *Brown*, and Smith *Thompson*, but must hereafter call Jones *Baker*, and Smith *Jenkins*. By the irony of fate, we are shown very clearly just how much stability some of the more recent and distressing changes are likely to have. E. g., *Nymphæa* becomes *Leuconymphæa* (1737) and *Castalia* is no more. In the same way *Carya* becomes *Scoria* (1808) and *Hicoria* is shelved. *Corydalis* becomes *Capnodes*; *Dicentra*, *Capnorchis*; *Glaucinium*, *Mosenthina*; *Lepidium*, *Nasturtium*; *Claytonia*, *Calandria*; *Ionidium*, *Calceolaria*, and *Calceolaria* something else; *Elatine*, *Potamopithys*; *Oxalis*, *Acetosella*; *Pelargonium*, *Geraniospermum*; *Rhus*, *Toxicodendron*, and so on *ad desperandum*. Even names which have stood more than 150 years, like *Liriodendron Tulipifera* and *Zea Mays* have to be converted into *Tulipifera Liriodendron* and *Thalsia Mays* to satisfy the ghost of some dead botanist, and the zeal of a live antiquarian.

Old debts become *outlawed* after a time, and it would simplify matters greatly to apply the same practice to old names. There seems almost no end to the changes a persistent rummaging of old literature can bring to light, and we may be certain it will not end with Kuntze. For one, I most devoutly wish the strict law of priority were at the bottom of the sea. It does seem that it would be better to study nature more and parchments less. But the proof of a pudding is said to be the eating, and this closely printed book of a thousand pages is commended to the digestion of Messieurs, the systematists.—ERWIN F. SMITH, *Washington, D. C.*